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OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF FORWARD DEPLOYED NAVAL SPECIAL  
WARFARE FORCES

By

Stewart G. Elliott

Commander, United States Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Captain Patrick T. Toohey, USN

William F. Donovan Military Chair  
of Special Operations

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## **Abstract**

### **OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF FORWARD DEPLOYED NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE FORCES**

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which led to the establishment of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1987 was intended to correct the problems associated with the command and control of the United States Special Operations Forces. In addition to USSOCOM, Theater Special Operations sub-unified commanders were created to facilitate effective command and control of forward deployed Special Operations Forces.

Currently, all forward deployed Special Operations Forces (SOF) are under the operational control of Theater Special Operations Commanders (SOC's) with the exception of forward deployed Naval Special Warfare Forces, who are under the divided operational control of Theater Special Operations and Fleet Commanders.

Theater SOC Commanders can provide effective SOF command and control, mission essential skills training, enhanced employment opportunities, and optimal SOF mobility support to deployed Naval Special Warfare Forces.

The 1991 Gulf War air war campaign of the coalition forces (Instant Thunder) was the driving force in the successful attainment of United States (U.S.) policy objectives during the Gulf War. The foundation of U.S. policy following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was clearly stated in the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolutions that were authorized in August and November of 1990:

- "1. "The unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait (Resolution 660, reaffirmed in resolution 678)
2. The restoration of the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Kuwait (Resolution 661, reaffirmed in Resolution 678)
3. The restoration of international peace and security in the area (Resolution 678)." (Dumais, p.5).

Through a brief description of the origins and development of the Gulf War air campaign, to include the process by which it was reassessed, it will be clearly evident why Instant Thunder was the primary factor in the successful accomplishment of the U.S. strategy during the Gulf War.

Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 01 August, 1990, the U.S. was caught by surprise and needed time to build up forces in the region, "Schwarzkopf himself recalled that it was not until September 24 – when the first of the heavy armored divisions was deployed to the desert – that he was confident he could repulse an Iraqi attack." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 57). Because, "Schwarzkopf had estimated that it would take eight to ten months to amass enough force for a land offensive" (Gordon and Trainor, p. 76), it was clear that U.S. Central Command, (CENTCOM) needed to come up with some immediate air offensive options which could thwart Iraqi aggression should Saddam Hussein conduct further de-stabilization of the region by attacking Saudi Arabia.

Due to a lack of air war planning expertise at CENTCOM, the responsibility for the initial draft of the Gulf War air campaign was given to Air Force Colonel John A.

Warden III who was in charge of a highly classified Pentagon war-gaming office named Checkmate. Warden immediately drafted his Instant Thunder plan based on a "five ring" paper he had written in 1988 that advocated a new approach to the traditional views of tactical and strategic air power. According to Warden, the Iraqi "center of gravity" was not their actual military forces deployed in Kuwait; "The bull's-eye was Saddam's command and control facilities in and around Baghdad, his political headquarters, his secret police network, even the statues of the Iraqi leader." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 80). The original initial Instant Thunder plan is best summarized by Dumais when he states,

"The basis for the plan was to attack strategic centers of gravity, at the higher levels of the military, political and economic systems, which would have the effect of "destroying Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war by destroying targets critically important to his regime." The plan focused strictly on the strategic level rather than the Kuwaiti theatre or ground forces. Colonel Warden's plan had assumed that air power alone could win the war with a six day strategic campaign attacking 84 targets." (p. 2)

The reassessment of Warden's original six day Instant Thunder plan commenced upon its first briefings to Schwarzkopf and Powell on 10 and 11 August. The idea that air power alone could resolve the crisis was highly debated. The central issue in the debate was Powell's argument that the "center of gravity" of Saddam Hussein's political power in Iraq and control over Kuwait was the Iraqi Republican Guard. Powell's focus on the destruction of Republican Guard units deployed in Kuwait was clearly evident when he stated, "I won't be happy until I see tanks

destroyed...I want to leave their tanks as smoking kilometer fence posts all the way back to Baghdad." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 84). Powell successfully convinced President Bush that the "air only" option would not result in Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, and contrary to Warden original plan, more emphasis needed to be placed on Iraqi ground units.

The final version of Instant Thunder, although modified by CENTCOM and Powell, maintained and supported the original Warden premise of initial air attacks on Baghdad by increasing the number of strategic targets from 86 to 300. The four phase plan strategic plan that was adopted by Schwarzkopf of, "Instant Thunder (strategic air bombing), suppression of air defenses over Kuwait, attrition of enemy force by fifty percent, and ground attack", (Dumais, p. 3), clearly furthered the reassessment Warden's plan by attacking the Iraqi military forces deployed to Kuwait in preparation for a ground attack.

During the actual execution of Instant Thunder which commenced on 17 January, 1991 a highly successful air campaign commenced which, "...dealt a crippling blow to Iraq's air defense and command and control infrastructure." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 223). As described by Clausewitz, due to the inevitable "interaction" and "friction" that occurs during the actual conduct of war, additional

reassessments of Instant Thunder occurred which included the re-targeting of air missions to hunt for Iraqi mobile Scud missiles, and "66% of air strikes being flown against Iraqi positions in Kuwait." (Colonel Hartenstein Lecture, 23, February 2001). Regardless of the modifications to the Warden plan, in the final analysis the 27-day Gulf War air campaign was the primary factor, which led to the successful 100-hour ground war that evicted Iraqi forces from Kuwait, thus creating an outstanding strategy/policy match by achieving all of the pre-war UN mandated political objectives.

Following the conclusion of hostilities with Iraq on 28 February 1991, high amounts of criticism has centered on the failures of Instant Thunder. The basis for this criticism clearly resides with the complete lack of combating the Iraqi mobile scud missile capability, and the failure to destroy Republican Guard units deployed to Kuwait.

The central issue in holding the U.S./Arab coalition together against was keeping Israel out of the Gulf War. "When Iraq fired its first salvo of Scuds at Israel, the Pentagon knew it had a big problem on its hands." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 230). In addition to the coalition problems created by Iraqi Scud attacks on Israel, "The

worst American losses in any engagement came when a Scud hit a barracks in the suburb of Dhahran." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 229). Furthermore, Scuds might have been used to deliver nuclear and chemical weapons. Schwarzkopf's inability to adequately address the Scud issue in pre-war planning was without a doubt a major shortcoming in the original Instant Thunder target list. Although, "according to American intelligence, there is no proof that CENTCOM succeeded in destroying a single Scud." (Gordon and Trainor, p. 246-247), adjustments to operational planning were effective in resolving the situation by deploying U.S. Patriot missile systems to Israel, increasing air missions against the Scud threat, and deploying special operations ground units to locate mobile Scud launchers in Iraq.

Further criticism of the air campaigns inability to effectively destroy Republican Guard units deployed in Kuwait prior to the ground war was substantiated by numerous intelligence reports. "According to CIA estimates, half of the Republican Guard T-72 tanks and half of the armored Personnel Carriers in the theatre managed to retreat out of harms way, as well as seventy percent of troops of one of the Guard Divisions." (Dumais, p. 6). It can be argued that by not completing the total destruction of Republican Guard units deployed to Kuwait facilitated



Saddam Hussein's ability to remain in power at the conclusion of the Gulf War, thus not accomplishing the UN mandated objective of restoring peace and stability in the region. Furthermore, by not achieving "...destruction of Iraq's offensive capability." (Dumais, p. 6), the U.S. is still conducting offensive operations and enforcing sanctions against Iraq ten years after the conclusion of the Gulf War.

Upon initial review, the above listed arguments clearly demonstrate some perceived failures of Instant Thunder. After further analysis however, it is clear that these arguments fail to recognize the broader issues of Gulf War strategy and peace and stability in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. As Sun Tzu states, "Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy." (p. 77). Saddam Hussein's strategy,

"...was based upon four assumptions. (1) He believed that Iraq would draw Coalition forces into a prolonged attritional ground war. (2) This war would produce heavy U.S. casualties. (3) Casualties would split U.S. opinion and force the United States to withdraw. (4) Israel could be goaded into attacking Iraq." (Mahnken lecture, 23 February 2001).

The outstanding reassessment and execution of Instant Thunder clearly attacked the pre-war strategy of Saddam Hussein, which led to a quick decisive coalition victory

over Iraq in the Gulf War. "...Iraq grossly underestimated the contribution that airpower could make in the conflict", (Cigar, p. 18), because not only it produce an outstanding shock factor to the Iraqi strategy, the air campaign served to significantly weaken Iraqi resistance prior to the commencement of ground operations. Furthermore, the idea that Republican Guard units which escaped from Kuwait resulted in Saddam Hussein's ability to maintain political control over Iraq was clear distortion of the actual tactical situation. As stated in A World Transformed,

"While we would have preferred to reduce further the threat Saddam posed to the region-and help undermine his hold on power-by destroying additional Guard divisions, in truth he didn't need those forces which escaped destruction in order to maintain internal control. He had more than twenty untouched divisions in other parts of Iraq." (Bush and Scowcroft, p.488).

In summary, the UN mandated political objectives that were the foundation of U.S. policy in the Gulf War were achieved with 100% success through the execution of Instant Thunder and follow on short duration ground operations. Iraq was successfully driven from Kuwait, and the Kuwait sovereignty and territory was restored. Additionally, due to continued Arab fear of further aggression by the regime of Saddam Hussein, a substantial build-up of U.S. military presence in the CENTCOM area of responsibility has

occurred, which has greatly enhanced international peace and security in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

The creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1987, by Congressional mandate, was, in part, intended to, "... correct serious deficiencies in the ability of the United States to conduct special operations and engage in low-intensity conflict activities."<sup>1</sup> The forces that were designated by the Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in 1987 as special operations forces (SOF) included the United States Army Rangers and Special Forces, Air Force Special Operations Units and Naval Special Warfare Forces. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) is the only USSOCOM component that habitually delegates operational control (OPCON) of forward deployed forces to both conventional and special operations (SO) commanders.

This paper will explore the efficaciousness of deploying NSW forces under this inter-theater divided OPCON concept and seek to determine the optimal command arrangements that will ensure effective command and control (C2) of deployed NSW SOF.

A brief examination of the U.S. Law that established USSOCOM and Joint Doctrine will provide the foundation for examining the issue of NSW inter-theater bifurcated OPCON. A further analysis of this issue with respect to NSW

deployments to the Central Command (CENTCOM) in support of Commander, U. S. Naval Forces Central (COMNAVCENT) will serve as an investigative operational perspective regarding the inter-theater OPCON of NSW Forces. Although this analysis will be limited to NSW Force deployments to CENTCOM, the information is relevant to all geographic theaters in view of the fact that the split OPCON of NSW Forces between the theater SOC's and Fleet Commanders is the standard in all theaters.

## **BACKGROUND**

Title 10, section 167 of the U.S. Code states that, "Unless otherwise directed by the Secretary of Defense, all active and reserve special operations forces stationed in the United States shall be assigned to the special operations command."<sup>2</sup> Section 167 further clarifies the role of the Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as being responsible for all aspects of special operations from developing strategy, doctrine and tactics to training and validation of operational requirements. For SOF deployed outside the Continental U.S., Title 10 provided for the creation of theater SOC's which, "...as a sub-unified command of the combatant unified commands, is the geographic CINC's source of expertise in all areas of special operations, providing the CINC with a separate element to plan and

control the employment of joint SOF in military operations." <sup>3</sup>

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which included the establishment of USSOCOM in 1987, also facilitated a re-organization of the Joint Staff that encompassed the formation of a separate Joint Doctrine Division. As directed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

Military doctrine presents **fundamental principles** that guide the employment of forces. Doctrine is authoritative. It provides the distilled insights and wisdom gained from our collective experience with warfare. Doctrine facilitates clear thinking and assists the commander in determining the proper course of action under the circumstances prevailing at the time of decision. Though neither policy nor strategy, joint doctrine deals with the fundamental issue of **how best to employ the national military power to achieve strategic ends.** <sup>4</sup>

Joint Doctrine definitively clarifies the distinction between SOF and conventional forces with respect to their respective mission, intelligence, and communication and training requirements. **"The demands of SO require forces with attributes that distinguish them from conventional forces.** Commanders must be familiar with these characteristics to ensure that missions selected for SOF are compatible with their capabilities."<sup>5</sup> Theater SOC commanders not only understand the capabilities and limitations of SOF, but are essential in providing unity of

command for theater SOF operations. Joint Publication 3-05 states that, "Successful execution of SO requires centralized, responsive, and unambiguous C2."<sup>6</sup> Theater SOC Commanders are designated by law and defined in Joint Doctrine as the Theater SO Advisor "...on the **proper employment of SOF.**"<sup>7</sup> The current practice of assigning NSW forward deployed forces OPCON to Fleet Commanders appears to contradict both the intent of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation, relative to C2 of SOF, and the prevailing Joint Doctrine. There are inherent differences between SOF and conventional forces:

Conventional units are normally not specially trained equipped, nor organized to conduct SO; any wholesale change in their capabilities would restrict their ability to respond to a broad range of threats. The need and opportunity to attack or engage strategic or operational targets with small units drives the formation of **special units with specialized, highly focused capabilities.**<sup>8</sup>

These "special units" are the SOF assigned to USSOCOM therefore, the "...**command and control (C2) of SOF should be executed within the SOF chain of command.**"<sup>9</sup> The intended command relationships under the current law and in Joint Doctrine for forward deployed SOF is that the Theater SOC exercise OPCON of all SOF in their respective theaters.

## DISCUSSION and ANALYSIS

An analysis of NSW deployments to CENTCOM under the split OPCON of COMNAVCENT and COMSOCCENT provides a clear representation of the issue. In order to obtain a present-day perspective and relevant information, interviews were conducted with key commanders and/or staff personnel of NAVCENT, SOCCENT, and Carrier Battle Groups (CVBG) and Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG) deployed to CENTCOM.

Commander, Destroyer Squadron FIFTY, Captain James Hanna commented that:

While OPCON is at the Fleet Commander level, actual control is more usually exercised with the group they have worked up with, i.e., CVBG or ARG/MEU. With the CVBG, the SEAL team will not have the organic support required for operations and thus depend on in-theater assets, which may not be available due to other taskings... The ARG/MEU is loath to release their SEAL team as they feel it will adversely affect their mission, even if there is a real world tasking for the team. One would think the Fleet Commander would step in but this does not happen often. A flag officer commanding the CVBG will often be refused the use of the team by the 0-6 ARG commander, even when no operations are ongoing nor anticipated.<sup>10</sup>

The "in theater assets" mentioned by Captain Hanna that are not available to COMNAVCENT NSW Forces include the SOCCENT SOF helicopter and fixed wing air assets, and the NSW surface mobility platforms which include Patrol Coastal Ships, SEAL Delivery Vehicles, MK V Special Operations Craft, and high speed rigid inflatable boats. The C2



problems mentioned by Captain Hanna relative to the separation of NSW personnel on different surface platforms and, conventional force commander personality-driven decision making on NSW employment were further addressed by Captain LeFever (Spring 2000 Persian Gulf Destroyer Squadron TWENTY-ONE Commodore):

In my role as SCC (Surface Combatant Commander) and MIO (Maritime Interdiction Commander) my desire was to employ the NSW forces for the mission of stopping illegal oil flow from Iraq. My experience was frustrating in that it was a long ordeal to have NSW forces reassigned to my control from the ARG in order to carry out the mission. I had an easier time getting NSW forces assigned to SOCCENT then these ARG forces.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these disadvantages, Captain Van Hook, the current COMNAVCENT Operations Officer, provided the following insights on the proper employment and training of NSW Elements assigned OPCON to COMNAVCENT:

There is a danger that NSW may not receive the dedicated attention to optimize their training and employment. While naval commanders have a wide range of naval warfare specialties at their disposal, they may not have the staff, budget, or time to focus on the unique requirements to optimize NSW, i.e. NSW may spend long periods afloat, unable to be exercised while fleet units exercise and train on other warfare areas. Special Operations components can focus more time, money and assets on those unique NSW requirements.<sup>12</sup>

COMSOCCENT, Rear Admiral Bert Calland, provided the disadvantages of NSW Fleet OPCON from the theater SOC perspective. Rear Admiral Calland was very concise in his response when he stated, "Employment - pure and simple.

The SOC will look for ways to employ NSW where the fleet CDR's may not."<sup>13</sup> Additional employment that SOCCENT could provide NAVCENT NSW personnel includes greatly enhanced training opportunities through the usage of in theater SOCCENT SOF mobility assets and live fire ranges. Operational employment opportunities would include deployments in support of JCS directed exercises, and SOCCENT controlled Joint Combined Exercises, and real world missions in support of other U.S. Government Agencies. These operational opportunities would be under SOCCENT command as opposed to conventional CVBG/ARG Commanders who are only in theater for brief periods, and have minimal knowledge regarding the appropriate employment and training of NSW SOF.

From a tactical level perspective, Commander Victor Meyer and Lieutenant Commander Jason Ehret, SEAL Officers and recent (FY 2000) NSW Task Unit ARG Commanders, submitted the following observations. Commander Meyer, who was assigned as the Tarawa ARG NSW Task Unit Commander, submitted that: "Long underway periods, and staying on station in the vicinity of a given contingency long after the time the NSW could add value has passed, significantly degrades readiness and has a deleterious effect on morale."<sup>14</sup> Commander Meyer further commented on the

problems associated with conventional fleet commander C2 when he stated: "...Fleet Commanders characteristically loath to chop their SEAL's away when they are not using them. This is not an efficient use of the SOF resources."<sup>15</sup>

Lieutenant Commander Ehret, who served as the Bonhomme Richard ARG NSW Task Unit Commander, offered the following:

"Possession of NSW forces for the sole purpose of ownership to "enhance" Fleet Commander's "Tool Kit" is what happens frequently to NSW. A Fleet Commander is unwilling to give up OPCON of NSW due to lack of understanding the OPCON/TACON relationships or his simple unwillingness to give "Anything" he owns to another force not in his chain of command. His ability to engage or employ his NSW forces usually is inadequate because of his lack of understanding of NSW missions or requirements. The limited sustainment training he can provide is unsatisfactory for the maintenance of NSW perishable skills necessary for successful mission completion. The Fleet Commander sees the need for NSW, but does not normally engage or sustain these forces properly in support of mission success."<sup>16</sup>

The final tactical level argument for theater SOC OPCON of NSW deployed forces was provided by Lieutenant Jamie Sands, who deployed to the Persian Gulf with the George Washington CVBG. In the execution of any military operation success is measured on results at the objective area. Regardless of whether or not the operation is conducted by SOF or conventional forces, great detail must be given to mission planning, preparation and rehearsals to ensure the best possible chance of success. Critical to

mission success, at the tactical level, is that there is an on scene commander who understand the capabilities, limitations, and mission requirements of the forces he is commanding. Lieutenant Sands offered the following:

If the Fleet Commander usurps the tactical decisions by the NSW Commander, serious consequences may result. The best example of this occurred while we were conducting a non-compliant boarding of an oil smuggler in the Northern Arabian Gulf. We were utilizing helicopters from an HS squadron aboard the carrier and a HSL squadron from the cruiser to carry our SEAL armed observers for security while we boarded the ship. When I called for the helicopters to close my position on the starboard bridge-wing to provide cover as we conducted breaching operations, the DESRON Commander in charge of the operation over-rode my decision and ordered the helicopters to maintain their station...we were simply lucky that the mistake wasn't costly.<sup>17</sup>

Not having SEAL armed observers located in the helicopter at the correct position during the most critical and vulnerable phase of the operation could have had severe consequences in the execution of the mission. The overall safety of the Lieutenant Sands' men during the initial underway boarding, as directed in NSW standard operating procedures (SOP's), is under the strict over watch of the SEAL airborne observers; had the situation escalated into a hostile engagement, the lives of the SEAL's moving onto the non-compliant vessel would have been placed into great jeopardy without SEAL airborne observer support. Although the procedures for the boarding operation had been

rehearsed and concurred with by all of the personnel involved, a Fleet Commander (O-6) who did not understand or appreciate NSW SOP's made a tactical decision that adversely affected the overall safety of the SEAL boarding team.

This example clearly illustrates the conflict and potential catastrophic consequence that exist in the execution of NSW operations controlled by officers inexperienced in SOF operations. The fundamental principles and intent of the SOF provisions of the 1987 Goldwater-Nichols legislation and Joint Doctrine regarding the C2 and employment of SOF were specifically developed to prevent situations as described by Lieutenant Sands. As previously mentioned, the theater SOC's were created to provide the SOF expertise to effectively execute the C2 and employment of all forward deployed SOF personnel. In view of the highly specialized nature of SOF operations, "Rigorous training and rehearsals of the mission are integral to the conduct of the operation."<sup>18</sup> The conventional Fleet Commander's lack of SOF experience and the understanding of the criticality of not unnecessarily deviating from the rehearsed plan in Lieutenant Sands' situation is a poignant example of inadvisability regarding conventional C2 of SOF tactical operations.

The counter arguments for maintaining the current split OPCON of NSW Forces between Fleet Commanders and Theater SOC Commanders is centered on operational flexibility and logistics. As stated by Captain Hanna, "OPCON at the Fleet Commander level allows a much quicker response to tasking granting greater operational flexibility to staff/unit granted TACON. OPCON at the Theater SOC, while workable, does add an additional layer of bureaucracy in that Requests for Forces must be generated each time NSW forces are needed."<sup>19</sup> Captain Van Hook furthers the argument on increased operational flexibility with Fleet Commander OPCON:

Having OPCON to a Fleet Commander vice special operations component allows direct tasking to support the naval component commander's maritime missions for which NSW is uniquely qualified. OPCON of NSW to the special operations component requires naval forces to compete within their own theater for these naval assets. In other words, NSW under the special operations component may be tasked to support that component's theater engagement priorities at the expense of valuable naval missions."<sup>20</sup>

In the area of logistics, Captain Lefever points out that the "...lengthy process to relocate the SEALs from the ARG to the CVN and ashore..."<sup>21</sup> may cause the availability of NSW personnel and assets to be restricted because of the lack of in-theater surface and air assets to support NSW mobility requirements. SOCCENT NSW Forces also rely on

U.S. Naval infrastructure to support and conduct operations. Examples of logistic support SOCCENT NSW Forces obtain from COMNAVCENT includes basing, ship repair facilities, force protection, administrative support, and access to in-theater NAVCENT helicopter and fixed wing air assets for administrative mobility throughout the CENTCOM area of operations.

From an NSW tactical commander's perspective, there are operational and logistic advantages to NAVCENT OPCON of NSW Forces. According to Commander Meyer, having the NSW Forces continuously embarked aboard Navy ships may ensure that NSW will be ready and available to respond to no-notice contingency operations tasked to the Fleet. Furthermore, the credibility and interpersonal relationships attained by having the NSW Task Unit Commander embarked with the Fleet Battle Group staff is essential to being fully interoperable with Fleet Commanders. The logistical support provided by a CVGB or ARG could be considered a valid argument for continued Fleet OPCON. According to Lieutenant Commander Ehret, because the Fleet Commanders can provide the full spectrum of logistics that includes "...mobility, free and adequate storage, inexpensive habitability, force protection, and

communications connectivity"<sup>22</sup>, there is merit in continuing the current OPCON arrangements with the Fleet.

These arguments supporting the current split OPCON arrangement notwithstanding, the operational effectiveness of deployed NSW forces, as with all other USSOCOM Forces, is best realized under the OPCON of the Theater SOC. The issues of administrative, logistical and mobility support can be most efficiently supported by a well reasoned Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) between SOCCENT and NAVCENT, as is the case for deployed Army and Air Force SOF between their respective Theater Service Component and SOCCENT. The rare occasion where operational flexibility is served by having NSW Forces embarked aboard ships does not historically, logically or operationally counterbalance the lengthy periods of under-employment and the serious degradation and loss of extremely perishable SOF warfighting skills such as weapons, parachute, demolitions, and small unit training. Furthermore, because NSW Forces embarked aboard ships become tied to ship schedules, the availability of NSW Forces in the Persian Gulf, under NAVCENT OPCON, is actually far less than eight months per year, leaving significant gaps in Fleet NSW SOF forward deployed presence. On the other hand, SOCCENT has a continuous presence of forward deployed NSW Forces in



Bahrain, and they have demonstrated their operational flexibility in support of NAVCENT by their 100% support of NAVCENT request for SOCCENT NSW Forces to support NAVCENT operational requirements. As a point of clarification, references made by Captain Van Hook about NSW Forces being "naval assets" that support "valuable naval missions" are in direct contradiction with the U.S. Law which created USSOCOM. NSW Forces are under the combatant command (COCOM) to USSOCOM, and as such are not considered "naval assets," but rather Joint SOF assets.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As stated in Joint Vision 2020, "In the joint force of the future, command and control will remain the primary integrating and coordinating function for operational capabilities and Service components. As the nature of military operations evolves, there is a need to evaluate continually the nature of command and control organizations, mechanisms, systems, and tools."<sup>23</sup> There is little argument that Theater SOC Commanders provide the more effective SOF C2, mission essential skills training, enhanced employment opportunities, and the optimal SOF mobility support to deployed NSW Forces. As COMSOCCENT, Rear Admiral Calland stated, "NSW forces should be assigned

OPCON to the SOC Commanders - that is all NSW Forces in theater. When appropriate, NSW Forces should be chopped TACON to Fleet Commanders." <sup>24</sup> Given this body of evidence, I have reasoned the following recommendations:

- The immediate re-structuring of NSW forward deployed command relationships to transfer OPCON of all deployed NSW SOF to the Theater SOC Commander.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to clarify the revised deployment orders for NSW SOF to charge the SOC Commanders with providing the optimal NSW support to the respective Fleet Commanders.
- Develop an exercise program to ensure the viability of SOC NSW support to the Fleet and to enhance the interoperability between the Theater SOC and Fleet.
- An NSW liaison element will remain embarked aboard CVBG/ARG C2 platforms to ensure coordination and integration of NSW support to the Fleet.

## **CONCLUSION**

The intent, with respect to Special Operations Forces, of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986

clearly envisioned that U.S. SOF would conduct operations and training under the OPCON of USSOCOM and the Theater SOC's. The U.S. Navy's nostalgic insistence on retaining OPCON of NSW SOF in support of Fleet operations perpetuates operational conflict and operational inefficiencies that we cannot continue to afford. The Theater SOC's can best support all fleet SOF requirements. The Theater SOC's operational capabilities have increased exponentially since their inception in 1987. USSOCOM's number one priority is the operational effectiveness of the Theater SOC's, and this effort has been realized and demonstrated in numerous and recent real-world SOC operations throughout the world. Now is the time for the Navy to unshackle the NSW support concept from the bonds of the past and support the intent of the Law and Joint Doctrine before we have a catastrophic mission failure the likes of which precipitated the 1987 Goldwater-Nichols Legislation.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict), United States Special Operations Forces Posture Statement 2000 (Washington, DC: 2000), 11.

<sup>2</sup> General Military Law, U.S Code, Title 10, sec. 167 (1992)

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict), United States Special Operations Forces Posture Statement 2000 (Washington DC: 2000). 13.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Pub 1 (Washington DC: 10 January 1995), vi.

<sup>5</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations, Joint Pub 3-05 (Washington DC: 17 April 1998), viii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., III-1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., III-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., II-1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>10</sup> Hanna, James S. <cds50@cusnc.navy.mil> "Request for Information." [E-mail to Stewart Elliott <[sgelliott@worldnet.att.net](mailto:sgelliott@worldnet.att.net)>] 25 April 2001.

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